

Today I urge all of my colleagues to join us. Be brave. Be bold. Take a stand for what is good and necessary. Or if you prefer, please take a seat, roll up your sleeves, and let's go to work. The time for silence is over. It is time to move.

Mr. Speaker, I truly believe that the spirit of history is upon us. We have a mission. We have a moral obligation and a mandate to do what is right. History will not be kind to us if Congress continues to turn a blind eye and a cold shoulder to those crying, begging, and pleading for action.

I ask my colleagues, each and every one of you, to join me in the well. We must pass commonsense legislation to prevent gun violence and mass shootings in our country, and we must act now. History is demanding, the people are demanding that we act, and that we act now—not next week, next month, or next year, but now, before we leave and go home.

FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A further message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Brian Pate, one of his secretaries.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 27 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. DOLD) at noon.

PRAYER

Reverend Dr. Phillip L. Pointer, Sr., Saint Mark Baptist Church, Little Rock, Arkansas, offered the following prayer:

Great Eternal One, we thank You for these Representatives whom you have given the sacred trust of participating in governing this great Nation.

We ask for Your blessing as they begin this session, which will serve to improve the lives of the citizens of this country. Please give them Your wisdom, resolve, and compassion.

May Your Spirit guide every heart, mind, and word so that, by Your power, justice, peace, prosperity, and wholeness are experienced by all who are blessed to live in this land.

Help our Representatives to continue to fully embrace the enormity of this task and to carefully execute their duties with integrity.

Bless their families and loved ones who participate in the sacrifice of governing vicariously.

Encourage them and grant them Your joy during difficult and lonely times.

Let Your loving light emanate from this House today and every day for the sake of Your glory.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to clause 1, rule I, I demand a vote on agreeing to the Speaker's approval of the Journal.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the Speaker's approval of the Journal.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8, rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ROTHFUS) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. ROTHFUS led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING REVEREND DR.

PHILLIP L. POINTER, SR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HILL) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Mr. HILL. Mr. Speaker, I rise to welcome today's guest chaplain and my good friend, Reverend Phillip Pointer, or "Pastor P" as he is known throughout our community.

Realizing his love for preaching the ministry as a teen, Pastor P earned his Doctor of Ministry from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, and his Master of Divinity with honors from The Samuel Dewitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia.

Having devoted much of his life to the church, Pastor Pointer found his way to Saint Mark Baptist Church in my hometown of Little Rock, Arkansas, in 2012, after 10 years as pastor of St. John Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia.

As a loving husband and father, Pastor P understands the challenge in balancing his responsibility to the church and to his family. At Saint Mark Baptist Church, Pastor P highlights the importance of our youth, with the church, adopting the motto "You. Grow. Here." to advance a safe, loving environment for families and children.

Within 2 years of Pastor P's time as senior pastor of the church, a new youth center was built to give Saint Mark kids a safe environment to learn and play.

Pastor P is the proud husband of his wife, Keya, and he is the loving father of their three children, Gabie, P.J., and Elijah.

I want to thank Pastor Pointer for gracing us with a wonderful opening prayer, and I wish him, his family, and Saint Mark Baptist Church continued success in the Little Rock community.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will entertain up to 15 further requests for 1-minute speeches on each side of the aisle.

VA REFORMS NECESSARY

(Mr. MCCARTHY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, I heard from veterans in my district years ago—long before I was the majority leader—that they weren't getting the disability payments they deserved. They submitted their claims, but the VA was too backed up. The process was taking months, sometimes years. The appeals process quickly became a never-ending bureaucratic maze.

After a report from the GAO and countless legislative hearings and testimony, today we vote on reforms by Chairman MILLER to ease the backlog that has only gotten worse.

Reforms to the VA are necessary. You can ask any vet who has had to wait or any whistleblower frustrated with the VA's culture. The VA has a long laundry list of changes it must make, but there is a problem. Unless the VA holds that handful of employees accountable who turn a blind eye, show up to work intoxicated, or falsify wait times, the culture won't change.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask: What would you do if you found an employee drunk on the job? Or, what if an employee was caught high on cocaine or found selling heroin in his free time? I think the words, "you're fired," come to mind pretty quickly. But for reasons I cannot even begin to understand, this logic is suspended for government employees.

When you turn a blind eye to unacceptable behavior, that is more than a management issue. Bad employees can make mistakes that threaten people's very lives.

Today, the average time to dismiss somebody from the VA is more than a

year. That is unacceptable. That is why Chairman MILLER's bill is needed. We need to protect the VA and those who go to it—the veterans who need the service. That is why I ask all, when we bring the bill up, please support it.

GUN VIOLENCE

(Mrs. NAPOLITANO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on gun violence.

Two-thirds of gun deaths are suicides, but rarely part of the conversation. These deaths are not inevitable. Allowing Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to research this, along with doing universal background checks, can and do save lives.

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. It is time for advocates to share stories of hope and to find solutions to self-harm. We must educate ourselves and our neighbors on signs and symptoms of depression to reduce suicide by gun.

Further work is needed. We must promote gun safety without stigmatizing those with mental illness. Congress must work to keep guns out of the hands of people who should not have them: domestic abusers and individuals with violent histories like assaults.

This is too important. We must act now. No longer can we tolerate it.

STRENGTHENING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

(Ms. STEFANIK asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. STEFANIK. Mr. Speaker, in my district, industries ranging from manufacturing to renewable energy production to mineral production regularly tell me about the need for a trained and qualified workforce. When I visit with students and families across my district, I hear about how eager workers are for these advanced opportunities.

Over the past 2 years, I have visited many of the BOCES, CV-TEC, and P-Tech programs throughout my district and know how critical the training they provide is to preparing our students to compete in a 21st century economy.

This is why I was proud to work with my colleagues on the Education and the Workforce Committee to pass the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act. This bipartisan bill will help equip students with the skills and experience they need to find jobs that will lead to long, fruitful careers by encouraging more local control and flexibility.

I am pleased that the House overwhelmingly passed this important legislation, and I urge the Senate to pass it and send it to the President's desk.

VOTE ON GUN LEGISLATION

(Ms. ESTY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. ESTY. Mr. Speaker, the American people deserve and the American people demand a vote on commonsense, bipartisan gun safety legislation.

During the 7 weeks that Congress was in recess, thousands of Americans were killed by guns. Each one of those Americans was precious. They had family, loved ones, coworkers, and neighbors. In the 3 years and 9 months since 26 people were killed in my district—20 first-graders, six teachers and educators—we have had not one debate, not one vote on this legislation.

The time has come. The time is now. We demand a vote.

VA ACCOUNTABILITY FIRST AND APPEALS MODERNIZATION

(Mr. PITTENGER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PITTENGER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5620, the VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act, of which I am a cosponsor.

We owe our brave veterans a debt we can never repay. As a small token of our gratitude, we have the privilege of providing veterans with appropriate care and benefits. Too often, the care provided at the VA expresses the opposite of gratitude and does not demonstrate the privilege of serving veterans.

This legislation promotes accountability by allowing incompetent VA employees to be fired for poor performance or misconduct. This legislation will also help the thousands of veterans stuck in the appeals quagmire by providing veterans more options in the appeals process.

Restoring accountability and transparency at the VA should not be a political issue. I urge all my colleagues to join me in support of H.R. 5620.

GUN ACTION THREAT OF CENSURE

(Ms. HAHN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. HAHN. Mr. Speaker, it has been almost 3 months since I joined JOHN LEWIS and my Democratic colleagues right here for a sit-in on the House floor to demand a vote on commonsense gun violence legislation.

Instead of letting us vote, instead of confronting this issue, Speaker RYAN and my Republican colleagues left town. Now we are back in session, there is still no talk about holding a vote, but there is a lot of talk coming from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle about punishing us for protesting on the House floor.

I hope they do. But I am not going to apologize for what I did. I am proud

that I did something to try to save lives.

I think they should apologize to the American people because they have not allowed us to vote on commonsense gun violence legislation. I think they should apologize, but they continue to do the bidding of the gun lobby. And I think they should apologize that, during our 7-week recess, 2,015 Americans were shot and killed.

My Democratic colleagues and I took action. They continue to sit on their hands.

□ 1215

LITTLE KIM WANTS WAR WITH THE UNITED STATES

(Mr. POE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, "This is not directed at Japan. The nuclear development is toward the United States," said an adviser to North Korean dictator Kim Jung Un.

Frankly, Little Kim makes his father look normal. His saber-rattling regime has once again attempted to fire intercontinental ballistic missiles. Meanwhile, the administration is naively pursuing a strategy they call "strategic patience." In layman's language, that means "doing nothing."

This hopeless appeasement policy has not worked. The North Korean plan is to launch nuclear missiles from submarines at the United States. Isn't that lovely?

The rogue state's belligerence has put the entire region at grave risk of aggression, nuclear proliferation, and war.

Historically, North Korea, like Iran, was a state sponsor of terrorism. Eight years ago, the United States withdrew the designation when North Korea lied and promised to halt its nuclear program. But North Korea continues to develop nukes.

Strategic patience is a blissfully ignorant failed foreign policy. North Korea must have consequences for its aggressive and belligerent actions. Time to put Junior Kim's regime back on the State Sponsors of Terrorism list, because he is a terror to world peace.

And that is just the way it is.

GUN VIOLENCE

(Mr. MCNERNEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MCNERNEY. Mr. Speaker, I would like to discuss gun violence facing our citizens and police.

Law enforcement officers and first responders across the country are faced with difficult and often unpredictable situations on a daily basis that require careful response to ensure public safety. That is why I introduced H.R. 5864.